

## The Heart Remembers by orphan\_account

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Alternate Universe - Modern Setting, Angst, F/M, Fluff, Mileven, Soulmates, Swearing

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Eleven | Jane Hopper, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler

**Relationships:** Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2019-09-08

**Updated:** 2021-03-02

**Packaged:** 2022-04-01 18:07:39

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 6

**Words:** 8,950

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

Mike has a bad encounter with short haired girl in the Hawkins college library

# 1. The Library

Mike grabbed the textbook from the locker. *Antenna Theory and Design*. Stutzman's book was a dry read but ever since his days as the president of the Hawkins AV club, his interest in just *how* the radio waves were sent and received became a fascination.

He decided to take a technical radio communications course in the renovated Hawkins Lab. It was now Hawkins Vocational Technical College, HVTC as it was shortened to. Most students just called it HV, or *HeeVee* for short.

HeeVee was a large building and covered a lot of different technical disciplines. It seemed like there were enough nerds in Hawkins to support the project.

Mike was sure it was just the Department of Defense trying to placate the mayor and the chief of police for whatever fiasco had happened back in the eighties.

He figured he'd need his notepad and pencils for his study session. He grabbed those too and went to the technical library located on the first floor of the college. His locker was located on the fifth floor below ground floor, and he didn't have any idea of how many underground floors were in the building, but given what HNL had been up to, he was sure there were a lot more below him. This floor was quiet. A lot of students went to the common area on this floor to nap, or get a full blown sleep.

The library was mostly full, he saw a table near the windows, only one guy was sitting at it. There was plenty of room to spread his papers out at the other end of the table. He wound his way to the table.

He felt the vibration of his cell phone. He was getting a text. He took a quick look. It was from Max.

[ MadMax: *I'm on the ground floor common room if you're looking for me. Be here for awhile.* ]

Mike, smiled. He'd get an hour of studying in and then go sit with her to gab for a bit. He sent her a quick acknowledgement text so she'd know he got hers.

He sat down across from the guy at the table.

"And just what do you think *you're* doing."

Mike already answered, "Maxwell's Equations," before he realized it was a girl's voice that had just spoken. With a little bit of an unfriendly edge to it.

He looked up. He was confronted by piercing, heartbreakingly beautiful eyes.

She had a look of disappointment on her face. "What? You not going to say anything to the weirdo with the buzzed hair?"

Mike surprised himself and said, "You have the prettiest eyes I have ever seen."

"Ok, you win the bet. Go tell your asshole friends that she spoke to you. Fuck off."

Mike turned a deep red, and gathered his note paper and book, "Sorry." He couldn't look at her. Not being able to look at those eyes ever again was going to be a painful reminder that he was lonely.

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[11: *Max! I just saw a guy with the most gorgeous ass, hair and eyes I've ever seen.*]

[MadMax: *Well, then, get over here in the common room and give me the deets.*]

Max waited for her best friend's reply. A few minutes later her phone buzzed.

[11: *False alarm, he insulted me, so I have elevated his ass to asshole status. Too bad, I'd jump him in a second. I'm on my way.*]

"Who's texting you? Lucas? I've been looking for him all day."

"Lucas is waiting for Dustin to get out of his cooking class. He finished with his coach early, and when Dustin's out they will go find Will in the art department. This," She held up her phone. "Was my friend El."

"You've mentioned her before."

"Yeah, you'll finally get to meet her. She's going to give me the details of some asshole whose ass she was ogling."

"Sound like you both need to get boyfriends," Mike cracked open his textbook again.

"Might be easier for me than it is for her." Max said.

"Yeah, it could happen for the rest of the day if you just showed any kind of interest in Lucas. You know he likes you right?"

"I don't want it to be awkward for you."

"You've been a party member for how long now? It was obvious to everyone a long time ago. Now we don't say anything because it we're all sure it's not going to happen. Lucas has been moping around us for a few years now. You notice he doesn't have a girlfriend, but there's been plenty of interest?"

Max was quiet. She said in a voice less sure of herself than Mike had heard for awhile, "I know, I thought he'd be more traditional and ask me out... it looks like he's waiting for me to make the first move."

"Lucas doesn't even *know* you like him. You've given him no signals whatsoever."

"Here she comes, try not to be too much of a dork. You should try brushing your hair every week or so."

"Never makes any difference. I'm stuck with a wild mop. It's not

driving the girls wild, that's for sure."

He was about to say *Hi* to shapely girl who sat diagonally from him, when he saw it was the girl from the library.

He felt his face heating up. "Um, sorry again," he pointed to Max, "this is one of my asshole friends. I'm going to fuck off now."

He got up and left quickly.

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"*That's* the asshole I was telling you about." El said smirking.

"Mike? No way. He's one of my best friends. He's one of the nicest guys you'll ever meet. And I agree with you gorgeous ass, eyes and hair. I don't believe for a second that he insulted you. What did he say?"

El was looking at Mike's retreating figure. Ok, *his ass El, you are looking at that nibblable ass.*

"Out with it El. What did he actually say?"

Suddenly she felt guilty, "He... he said I had the prettiest eyes he'd ever seen. I thought he was being an asshole and told him to eff off."

Max looked at her sternly, "El, *that's* not an insult. It's a compliment. He must have been really taken with you because Mike is about as shy as they come. You didn't say *eff* did you?"

El looked down and shook her head.

"I don't know if you realize it or not. But every time we talk about guys and you describe your perfect guy, you are literally describing Mike. I was going to try and set you two up, but *that* sure as shit isn't going to happen now. Shit, I should go see if he's alright."

El was silent. *Max was right. What the hell had she been thinking.* She had long gotten over being self conscious about her hair, so why had this guy suddenly made her feel vulnerable again? She had outlined her perfect boyfriend to Max dozens of times. And then one day he sat in front of her. She had screwed it up royally.

"I'll apologize to him."

"Mike doesn't like confrontation, I'll bet he didn't argue with you when you told him to fuck off, did he?"

"No, he just said sorry, and left right away."

"He won't sit with me if you are here, so you need to fix this shit right away. You guys are both my friends. I'm not going to schedule when each of you can sit with me."

"I'm sorry Max."

"Apologize to yourself, El. You didn't do yourself any favours. I'll work out some way for you to apologize to him. Mike is a really nice guy. You two would actually be perfect for each other. Mike's not really had it easy."

"Oh?"

"He was bullied a lot as a kid. One day on a family trip his dad fell asleep at the wheel, and they crashed into a tree. His dad and older sister were killed. It's only his mother and his little sister Holly left at home now."

"That's awful. I feel like shit now. He's smart too. He's taking the technical side of radio communications. You're right, he's the guy I've wanted to meet since I was twelve." El bit her lower lip. "Shit."

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[MadMax: *She's gone, you can come and sit with me now, asshole :) ]*

Mike smiled. Max never missed an opportunity to stick it to him in a funny way if she could.

He made his way back to the common room. He picked up two coffees, found Max's table and went over.

"Hey, Max, sorry if it was awkward for you guys after I left." He passed one of the coffees to her.

"Mike, you should let her apologize to you."

"You know what Max? It's not really her words that bothered me, they weren't that bad. It was the look in her eyes. You have eyes that pretty, rip into your soul with that kind of vitriol. It comes from the heart."

Mike looked a little wistful. "Pretty eyes, ugly heart."

## 2. Regrets

El was coming up to Max and her friend Mike and heard the last part of her conversation. Mike called her *pretty* again. Well her eyes anyway, she always thought they were her best feature. Most guys just looked at her ass, what she had for breasts, and gave up completely when they saw her hair. So knowing that Mike had actually *looked* at her eyes gave her a secret thrill.

The thrill was short lived when he went on to say, “Pretty eyes, ugly heart.”

By then she was at the table and sat down diagonally from him again. “I deserved that.” She said unable to meet his eyes. She felt crushed, completely useless.

To her surprise he said, “No, not really, sounded more clever than it really was. You don’t have an ugly heart. I shouldn’t have made a judgement or a comment like that. I’ve been the target of that kind of thing for a lot of my life. It was unfair to you, so I’m really sorry.”

She looked up at him. He looked hurt, waiting for her acceptance.

She tried to give him the prettiest smile she could. Suddenly he looked flustered, like he didn’t know what to do. He started to blush. He looked away.

He seemed too embarrassed to look at her. *It’s my hair. I know it is. He doesn’t want to stare at it and can’t even bring himself to face me again. Shit.* His apology sounded and felt sincere, El wasn’t really worried that he didn’t mean it. *Maybe Max was right, Mike was just really really shy.*

Max was throwing things in her backpack, Mike looked at her. The rest of El’s smile was wasted. It was just for him, but it was wasted. *Fine, we can be civil when we are sitting with Max, but that’s as far as it goes. I’m out of here.*

Max said, “K, peeps, I have to go prep for a lab. Make sure you work out all your baggage before I get back.”



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She looked at him, her eyes were stunning, way beyond pretty. He realized she was smiling at *him* . He felt his face heat up again, and he was at a loss for words. He tried unsuccessfully to force himself to look at her again.

Mike felt the cool attitude before he heard it. “Oh, look at the time. Have to go.” Then she was up and gone.

Mike sat there alone at the four seat table. *Oh my God, her eyes. How friggin’ rude was that? Seeing her eyes and then looking away like you couldn’t face her. Smooth move Wheeler.*

He saw a backpack drop into the seat where El had been sitting, and Max sat down across from him.

“I think El likes you.” Max said grinning. “Did you see the way she smiled at you?”

Mike had. He knew for as long as he lived he would never see a prettier smile than that, not one directed at him. But it must have been all show.

“Uh, that must be why she had to go leave to watch another M.A.S.H repeat. Or something, anything else that wasn’t sitting here with me. Nah, she’s not interested Max.”

“But you are?”

“You know me, a girl takes the least bit of interest in me and that’s all I can think about for the next two or three years while I pine away. I recognize that in myself. You don’t think I do, but I do. Not this time.”

“I can tell, she was kind of into you. Believe it or not she’s about as shy as you are, drives me crazy when we go out. I was kind of fascinated by her stringing that many words together to talk to you.”

“Max, she’s so not interested in me. She sounded more interested in watching episode eleven of a fifteen part series on the history of socks. Even after missing the first ten episodes. “

“I don’t believe you. Are you making up excuses because her hair doesn’t do anything for you?”

“Her hair?”

"You didn’t noticed that shorter than short hair?”

Mike shrugged. “So she keeps it short. Makes her eyes really stand out.” Mike stopped himself from continuing, thinking about her eyes. He couldn’t go there. What was the Shakespeare quote? “*Down that path lies madness?*” Something like that. He needed to concentrate on his studies, daydreaming about kissing her would...

*Kissing her? Mike, are you insane? Closest you are ever going to be to her is... civil when Max is around. Nothing more than that. She could have any guy here she wanted, short hair or not.*

“I’m going to tell her you like her.” Max said, a hint of a mischievous twinkle in her eye. Totally unlike her. But it got the reaction she was hoping for.

Mike’s eyes bugged out, “Geez Max, don’t say that, you’ll just embarrass her, and then yourself when she tells you about that socks episode. She is not interested. I don’t need to be kicked in the head. “Oh look at the time. Have to go. I think there’s a new blade of grass outside I need to check up on, see if it’s growing.”

“Mike, she didn’t say that, don’t be a drama queen.”

“Ok not the grass part, but the rest is exactly what she said.”

Max looked thoughtful, “Anyway, I’m outta here, this time I really do have a lab to prep for.”

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*I feel blah. I definitely feel blah. No matter how nice I try to smile at him I can't get him to look at me for more than five seconds. After I told him off this morning, he should have glared at me. And after I apologized to him, he didn't even say thank you...*

El was in the middle of her reverie when Max sat beside her in the lab.

"I thought you two were going to fix your shit after I left."

"If you are going to have an honest conversation with a guy, he should at least look you in the eyes. You know what? He can't even do that. It's my hair. I just know it."

"It's funny you should mentioned eyes. He really likes yours. How many times has he told you?"

El looked down, giving herself a little smile, "A few times."

"That's it then. He can't look at you because he probably gets all flustered when he looks at you."

"Do you think so?"

"He shrugged when I mentioned your hair. I know Mike. He's definitely feeling off today. Like he doesn't know what to do. He wasn't like that this morning, only after he met you. And he's honest, El. Mike would never lie to you. Especially not if he liked you."

El felt a sense of urgency. She wanted to see Mike. She felt the need to clear things up. If nothing else to get rid of the sense of impending doom in her stomach.

"I'm skipping lab, sorry Max, can you cover for me."

"Go to him, El. I've got your back."

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El almost ran to the ground floor common room in HeeVee. She was relieved when she saw Mike. She saw who he was talking to. A pretty girl with long dark hair.

*Oh, no. She thought to herself. I'm too late. How can I be too late?*

She was about to turn away when the girl looked up at her, and said something to Mike, he said something back and the girl waved El over.

*Now I don't think I can look at him. I can't take this up and down, I'll be sick to my stomach before the day is out.*

She sat diagonally from Mike once again. She couldn't look at him at all. She stared at the table in front of her.

"El, this is Suzie. She's an exchange student from Utah, and also happens to be taking the same program I am"

*Was Mike introducing me to the girl he's interested in? Was Max wrong after all? This girl was beautiful, her long dark hair would attract any guy. Why am I acting like a middle school girl? It's not like I liked him or anything... except I think I do. I think I'm going to throw up*

... and she is my best friend Dustin's girlfriend."

A huge wave of relief washed over her. She was flushed, she started to sweat. *Oh great, I'm going to look like I'm tweaking. What kind of impression is that going to make.*

"I have to go Mike, I'm sure my Dusty-bun is waiting for me."

Mike chuckled, "We'll catch you two later." El heard the girls retreating footsteps but she was feeling dizzy and her vision was blurred.

"Geez El, are you ok? You don't look very good, uh, I mean you're still pretty, but um, you look uh, sick, um, yes, I *did* just say pretty. That will be my cringeworthy moment of the day. Um, stay right here El. Don't try to stand."

El heard a buzzing in her ears. She was going to faint.

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El opened her eyes. Mike's where smiling down on her, worried, but still smiling. She felt strong arms bring her slowly to a sitting position, her head had been laying in his lap. He was on his knees beside her on the floor. He brought a cold bottle of water to her lips. It seemed darker in the room now than it did earlier. She noticed the flourescent lights were off.

"Slow sips." Mike said gently.

She felt the cool breeze of air conditioning on her face. It was incredibly nice and cold. She took a deep breath and felt the air in her lungs. It smelled like autumn leaves.

"You missed quite a show before you fell over. Power went out, big glass window behind us blew out. That's tempered glass, so there must have been a huge pressure change."

El couldn't really tell him what had actually happened.

"I'll help you up." Mike almost lifted her off the floor. He steadied her while she sat down. She looked around at people staring hat her."

"Shows over." He told everyone, they drifted away as soon as he sat down.

"Um, El, do you want me to take you to the nurses station. You aren't sick or anything are you."

“Or anything?” She couldn’t help teasing him.

“Um, you know, uh, *girl* problems?”

“Do you think *that’s* why I was so bitchy to you this morning?” Mike got the deer in the headlights look, and she could see he was getting flustered as his face reddened.

She instantly regretted teasing him. She touched his forearm with her hand. “Mike, it’s ok. I came over to talk to you.”

Mike was avoiding her gaze.

“Mike. Look at me... please?”

Mike looked at her with his dark eyes, and El thought she would melt into the chair. *What would it be like to have this guy holding your hand while walking down the hallway. Not one girl would be able to stop staring, they’d be jealous that he picked me to be with.*

“I didn’t want my shyness to cause any regrets for me later...,” she said.

“Me either, so I hope I don’t make a fool of myself but I’m just going to come right out and say it.” Mike kept his eyes on her. “You are the most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen or talked to. And wow, I just realized that if you are already spoken for....”

“Spoken for?”

“You know, old saying, someone else has claimed your heart... a boyfriend, or girlfriend I guess. That would be wear the fool thing comes into...”

“No,” El looked down her face reddening, “no guy has claimed my heart. It’s free.”

*Oh, God. He’s going to do it! I think he’s actually going to ask me marry him! I know, I know. Too fast, El, but I think he’ll at least he’ll ask me out... maybe, I think... I hope. My answer will be yes in either case.*

“Do you feel up to, um, maybe, having , uh, coffee with me after

classes?”

“ Yes!” El yelled out, and then clapped her hand to her mouth when people started to look at them. A few people clapped, a few others hummed Mendelssohn’s *The Wedding March*. *There was more laughing. Other’s whistled Wagner’s Here Comes The Bride.*

Mike jumped back, “Ok, that’s a yes, then. My only hope is that I can live up to that enthusiasm.” He glanced around, “And everyone else’s expectations.

El was happy. She could see that Mike could not keep from smiling when he wasn't looking at her. It seemed like Max was right after all.

He *did* like her.

She was hoping it wasn’t too soon to be thinking of... kissing Mike Wheeler.

*How about holding hands El? Try that first. Ok, I’ll do that first.*

*Then I’ll kiss him.*

### 3. Coffee And Kisses

El decided she was *not* going to wait until she'd held hands with Mike before kissing him. She felt that sense of urgency again. Like time was running short. This wasn't one of her abilities, she didn't know what it was, but she felt a strong, overpowering connection to him.

She asked Max where Mike's locker was. Five floors down. El hated to go to any of the basement floors of HeeVee, they still reminded her too much of the lab. She had been terrified to take courses here, but she wanted, needed to stay close to Hawkins.

She found his locker, and stood there leaning against it. He would be along any minute.

*I don't get it. I've never been this gaga over a guy before.* She was starting to think she was acting like a schoolgirl. *It's because I never got to be a real schoolgirl. Never had any real crushes, nobody had any crushes on me, that's for sure.*

When she first saw Mike approaching she started to relax. It was short lived, as soon as he smiled at her, she felt the hard thumping in her chest as her heart beat faster.

"You didn't have to come down here El, I would have found you at your locker."

"Mike." She said quietly, "I don't want to miss the chance of ever doing this."

She put and hand behind is neck, parted her lips and reached up to kiss him.

She felt her soul release. All her anger, frustration and fear from the lab went into the passion of the kiss. All her sadness, loneliness, and love went into the hunger of the kiss. She gave it everything she had.

And the most amazing thing happened. Mike kissed her back, she *felt* the passion from his kiss. She felt his own hunger. A tear fell from her eye and made it's way down her check, eventually transitioning



to his cheek.

El could have kissed him forever, when they finally parted, they looked at each other, both wide-eyed and out of breath.

“That was me.” They both said at the same time.

Each gave the other half smiles, nodded and said, “I know.”

It was Mike who first spoke after that. In a soft voice he said, “No doubt in my mind, El. We were meant to be together.”

“Yes.” She said. “I don’t want to go out for coffee, we’ll have coffee in front of the fireplace at home. My home.”

She looked down at his jeans. She saw Mike turn red. “I’m not sleeping with you tonight. There are no sleepovers. Not tonight.”

He nodded, “Ignore that, El. I had no control over it.”

She put her hand on his arm, “It’s ok. I’m actually flattered I have that effect on you. And yes, in case you are wondering, you have the same effect on me. The girl version of course.”

They both laughed.

“Let’s get out of here,” Mike said.

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Mike put his books in his locker. He wouldn’t be doing any studying tonight, he’d never be able to concentrate. There were a jumble of emotions inside him. It was all happening so quick

He turned to face El, she must have sensed that he was coming in for a kiss because her face upturned and she started to close her eyes.

The kiss wasn’t as deep as the first, but it meant just as much to Mike. It seemed perfectly natural to take her hand and walk with her

out of the elevator. He didn't notice that she looked down and gave herself a little smile.

One they were outside, he started in the direction of home. El tugged on his hand. "Where are you going?"

Mike stopped, "Um, I don't know, I guess I was going home to drop off my books, but I'm not carrying any. I should probably tell my mom I'll be out late, so she doesn't worry."

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*He still lives with his mom? Be fair El, he wasn't given a cabin in the woods like you were. Speaking of which you need to get out your blindfold. Mike doesn't get to know where you live. Doesn't matter how you feel about him.*

"Mike, I have a car. I'll drive you to your place, then we head out for mine. Ok?"

"Thanks El. I'm on Maple."

"I know where that is, Max likes this guy named Lucas who lives there. She made some lame excuse one day so we could knock on his door."

"Lucas is my best friend. He doesn't even know Max likes him. I've told her this already. I don't know what she's waiting for. He's a nice guy."

*Not as nice as you are Mike.* El thought. She was feeling very dreamy. It was happening so fast.

She pulled into Mike's driveway. She saw the wheelchair ramp winding to the front door.

“Is that for your mom?” She said quietly, her voice respectful.

“And my little sister Holly.”

El clamped her hand to her mouth and started to cry, “I’m so sorry Mike.”

“It’s ok El. It was bad. I won’t lie to you. My mom will never walk again, but Holly can walk with crutches now, she’s determined to walk before she’s 16. She’s only 8 but she’s very very stubborn.”

El saw Mike’s smile when he talked about his little sister. That smile held so much love El burst into tears. “Sorry Mike”

“I did my crying a long time ago El. No more tears left for me. Do you want to meet them?”

“Very much,” El said, “Can you give me minute please?”

Mike sat in silence with her as she composed herself.

“I’m ok now Mike. I’ll try not to cry in front of them,” El wasn’t convinced herself that she could do that. She would try to be brave for Mike.

*I think I feel this way because I’m falling in love with him. It’s not pity or sympathy, Mike’s childhood was at least as bad as mine was.*

They entered the house from the door to the basement. “This is where I lived as a kid, literally. I had a bedroom but I spent all my time down here. Now it’s more like a basement apartment with its own entrance.”

“Mom,” Mike yelled up the stairs, “I’m home.”

He led El the way to the kitchen, Mike’s mom was on the phone, “I have to go, Mike’s here. I’ll call later.”

She turned to Mike and El, a big smile lit up her face, “Mike, you didn’t tell me you had another pretty friend. Who’s *also* a girl.”

El felt distinctly uncomfortable until he leaned over and said in a low

voice, “Max.” El was back to feeling dreamy.

“Mom, this is El...”

“Hopper,” El finished for him and held out her hand to shake his mom’s.

“She’s my...”

“Girlfriend,” El finished for him again, a quick side glance at Mike, he was nodding his head. A very happy smile on his face.

El was sure she was glowing. *Oh God. I have a boyfriend. An actual boyfriend. I can’t wait to tell Max... and my dad. Shit.*

“Pleased to meet you El.” *Could she be any nicer? It’s no wonder Mike was a nice guy.*

They all heard the sound of something falling. And then a little girls voice, “Fucking crutch!”

“Language!” Both Mike and his mom yelled to the living room at the same time.

They looked over and Holly was standing there. With no crutches. Standing freely on two legs, albeit they looked a little wobbly.

“Holly!” Mike zoomed over and got down on his knees to hug her, “Be careful, Ok?”

“I’ve been walking almost all day.”

Mike’s mom started to cry and El bent over to hug her. “Mike said she was determined, ” El said so that only his mom could hear. She continued to cry but nodded her head.

“Mom, El and I have things we need to talk about, so I’m going over to her place ok? I, uh, may be late.”

“It’s fine Mike, I have your number. It’s Friday night, you kids have... fun.” His mom said.

“I’ll give you mine also Mrs. Wheeler.”

“It’s Karen, please.”

“Ok... Karen, call if you need Mike earlier ok?”

“If i need him...”

XXXXX

As soon as Mike and El were back in the car, Mike looked over to her, could see her face crumble and she burst out crying again.

“It’s ok El, it really is.” He slid over to her side and hugged her. She cried on his shoulder for a long time.

They were silent for the ride to... well it looked like nowhere. Mike could only see trees on either side of the road.

El looked at him. “Mike there are things we don’t know about each other. I just got a crash course in your life, but mine is not so simple.”

Mike frowned, “Um, Ok. I think at this point you can tell me, uh, more about yourself.”

“Ok, let’s start with this,” she pulled a large black cloth from her purse. “Put on the blindfold Mike.”

That was the last thing he was expecting, he tried to make light of it by saying, “I wish I’d known you wanted to have kinky sex in the car El, I, uh, would have, um, brought some protection.”

“Two things Mike. First, we are not having kinky sex in the car.” El smirked.

“And two, you don’t need protection.” She held up the blindfold, “It’s all part of this. I’ll guide you to my place. Trust me ok.”

“I trust you El.” He tied the blindfold around his head. Between that

and the darkening day, he couldn't see a thing.

El looped her arm around his. "I won't let you fall Mike."

"Um, El? I'm having kind of a weird day."

"Me too Mike, I always hoped I'd have to blindfold my boyfriend to show him where I live."

"What?!"

"Now that I'm actually doing that, it feels, well, weird. So I understand a little of how you feel."

"Uh, you aren't the one blindfolded El. I'm pretty sure *my weird* is weirder than *your weird*."

"We'll see about that, only a little ways further."

XXXXX

"I'll make coffee, you make a fire?"

A few minutes later they sat in front of the fire with coffee. Mike could see the dancing flames reflected her eyes.

"El..."

"I know, Mike." She leaned over to kiss him. It was a long kiss. Not as hungry as their first kiss, but just as honest.

Mike spent the next several hours doing exactly what he always wanted to do with a girl he was pretty sure he was in love with.

He talked with her all night until the sun came up.

## 4. Life Stories

El felt her heart pinch when Mike talked about his mom and his sister. She could see the love for them in his eyes. She only hoped that someday he would love her as much. She was sure she already felt that love for him.

Not once while they talked throughout the night did he try any moves on her. They had kissed a few times, sure, but they mostly talked. Mike talked about how he had felt nothing after the accident. He said that he and his dad had never been close, he was still too much of a nerd to get along with his sister who only seemed to be interested in boys.

But he had cried when he first saw his mom and Holly in a wheelchair. When he told El he thought at the time he would literally die crying. Tears streamed from his face as he described how useless he felt. But he was determined to help them all he could and basically dedicated his life to making sure they were comfortable, drove them to appointments, anything they needed. He sacrificed what little social life he had, he sacrificed any potential lovelife. He said he spent years being so lonely he had cried himself to sleep unable to drive the fear of being alone for the rest of his life to the back of his mind.

El wasn't able to help herself and cried on his shoulder, she would repeat many times throughout his recounting his grief that she was there for him, he would never be alone again.

When he thanked her for taking his loneliness away, she had cried even harder.

He was the one. He was the one she would love forever.

So she told him.

She told him *everything*. He would shake his head in disbelief at how cruel Papa had been. How cold and clinical all the staff had been in the lab. He would get angry and cry in frustration that once again he couldn't help someone he loved.

El had stopped her story and said with trepidation, "You... you love me?"

He had just nodded and this time it was her shoulder that he cried on. They had hugged each other rocking back and forth saying *I love you's* over and over until they just started laughing because it sounded so silly after the hundredth or two-hundredth time.

"After all that El, what can you do? Can you show me? You don't have to."

"I want to." El tried as hard as she could, Mike panicked when he saw the blood bubble burst from her nose. But she did it! She moved a dime about an inch. But then she felt a little sick.

She gave Mike a sickly smile, but she didn't have the energy to say she was ok, he picked her up and carried her to her room. He put a cold face cloth on her forehead and cleaned up her nose.

"We just found each other... I can't lose you now... I can't."

El gathered her resources and reassured him, "You won't lose me. Promise."

XXXXX

When El opened her eyes, she felt much better.

Mike had lain beside her all morning, his arms around her.

The sun had come up but it was overcast, Hawkins was getting another rainstorm.

"Looks like I slept with you anyway." She smiled at him. Mike's relief was like a physical wave of love coming from him. It was intoxicating.



"That's the last time you do that." Mike said firmly. "You don't ever need to prove that to anybody ever again. I was scared to death. I felt a little giddy knowing my girlfriend had magical powers... but I was scared when you couldn't talk."

"I didn't want you thinking I was crazy and made up the story, trying to make my childhood worse than yours."

"Yours *was* much worse than mine. Brenner was eating away at your soul."

"Mike?" She couldn't quite look at him. "I have a lot of love to give you... you won't ever regret being with me." When she did look up at him it was through tears, and Mike leaned in and kissed them away. "I'm sorry I told you to f... eff off."

Mike chuckled. "I didn't understand why. It bothered me a little. I get it now, you have nothing to be sorry about."

"A guy you think is cute tells you that you have pretty eyes, prettiest that he's ever seen, and you tell him to eff off? No Mike. I'll feel bad about that for a long time.. I think if we had talked at the library, you would have been my boyfriend by the end of the conversation."

"I think you're right." He smiled at her.

"Do you want to stay the weekend?" She asked.

"I need to pick up a change of clothes... and check in on my mom and Holly."

El nodded, "Of course... and I'll take you to the police station and introduce you to my dad."

"Oh, yeah, *that* ."

"That's right Mike, *that*. He'll put the proper fear into you so you treat me right."

Mike looked shocked and El instantly felt sorry she'd said it, "Mike," she said gently.

"I *know* you'll treat me right. I never had any doubts."

XXXXX

As El drove them to Mike's house, she said, "Remember that window shattering in school?

"When you fainted? Yeah. I rememb- wait, was that you? That took a lot of energy but you seemed to be ok... um, what's...?"

"If I *try* to use it, it takes a lot of effort, and well... you saw the results... but when I'm under emotional strain, it's a lot more powerful and destructive. I have no control over it. Sometimes nothing happens. We had an emotional night, but nothing happened."

"I hope to be with you whenever it happens."

El gave him a quick glance and smile. "I will wait in the car, we don't want to spend too much time here, I want to make sure I catch my dad at the station."

"Ok, I'll be right out, " Mike leaned over and kissed her. He pulled back and gave her a serious look, "I love you El."

"I love you too Mike."

He got out and run to the basement door.

He was only a few minutes, he left the house through the main door, and El could tell he'd been crying.

"Oh, Mike." She said to herself as he walked slowly towards the car, he turned back and waved to somebody looking out the window..

He was quiet when he got in the car. El carefully asked. "Is everything ok?"

“Holly walked to me from my bedroom door to where I was packing some clothes... she came over to give me a hug, told me to give you one too.” he said in a very shaky voice. He was trying to keep from crying again.

“I think you’re right Mike, she will walk and probably run before she’s sixteen.”

Mike nodded, silent.

“You ok to meet my dad?”

“Yeah, I hope he likes me. He comes by every now and then to check up on us.”

El smiled, she had an idea and was sure was going to work out.

XXXXX

“Hi Flo, is my dad still here?”

“Go on in sweetie.”

El grabbed Mike’s hand and dragged him to her dad’s office.

El didn’t see it, but Mike did, Hopper looked at Mike and gave him a *eh, could have been worse* expression . But when he saw the look on his daughter’s face, he stood up, walked around his chair, and shook Mike’s hand. “Looks like she’s gonna be your problem now.”

El opened her mouth in disbelief and swatted her dad’s arm in mock anger.

“How’s your mom and Holly?” Hopper asked.

“They are good, sir.”

“Holly can almost walk.” El said excitedly.

“You’ve met them?”

El nodded still smiling, “Dad, Mike is going to stay the weekend with me, we’ll be studying... but there’s going to be lots of kissing. Can you check in on them? We are probably going to be kissing... a *lot*.”

“I get it, kid. I don’t need to know any more than that.”

“I just want to make sure, because we kiss for a long time, and I don’t want you embarrassed if you walk in on us kissing.”

Hopper looked at Mike, “You know she’s just trying to piss me off now right?”

“Is it working?” El said, “about you not showing up unexpectedly, cause we’ll be kissing?”

Hopper rolled his eyes.

Mike looked back and forth to El and her dad. “If it helps at all sir, I love your daughter very much.”

El was about to say something more about the kissing, but she stopped and broke into a wide smile. She knew her cheeks would be pink, but she didn’t care. Mike had declared his love for her in front of her dad. She couldn’t be happier.

“It does Wheeler. I’ll check in on them, you two go study... or whatever.” He was looking down at a report, he would not meet either of their eyes.

El let go of Mike’s hand, and went to her dad to hug him and kiss him on the cheek. No words were spoken. She went back to Mike grabbed his hand and said, “let’s go.”

“Max said you were really shy.” Mike said.

“Not in front of my dad. We’ve been too much to keep secrets from each other.”

“Well, I’m sure he knows now that we plan on kissing all weekend. I wasn’t thinking of studying at all. You didn’t need to go on about it. I’m sure he’d never make a surprise trip to the cabin.”

“Mike.” She said quietly. “That wasn’t what I was talking about.”

Mike looked confused, El continued. “I want... “ she took a deep breath. “I want us to be intimate this weekend.”

“Um... uh... um... “

“I know, neither of us have experience. Think of it as part of the fun, another way of us getting to know each other.”

“Are you sure, El?”

“I am sure that I want to spend the rest of my life with you... and... I think you want the same?” Mike nodded his affirmation.

“Then I am sure. I’m yours Mike. I want to be *completely* yours.”

“I’m nervous.” Mike said, looking into her eyes.

“Me too. But I know the way I feel about you. It’s the next step.”

“Ok. Kissing weekend it is.” Mike winked at her.

El winked back.

## 5. Pretty... Good

El wanted to look nice for Mike on the Monday morning when she went to pick him up at home. She put on a blue dress that hugged her curves. She tried a little lip gloss. She tried a little eyeliner. She liked what it did for her eyes. She didn't know if doing all this would make her pretty or not, but she *felt* pretty. Not the short haired weirdo that girls called her behind her back.

She took a final look in the mirror before heading out to the car.

She touched her hair and said, "Pretty... good."

XXXXX

She rang the bell of Mike's house. Holly answered, and then yelled down the stairs to him. "Your girlfriend is here Mike. And she's pretty. Too pretty for you."

El could hear him running up the basement stairs and stop dead in his tracks when he saw her. At first she thought she must have gotten a stain or something on her dress.

He was staring at her. He walked slowly to her. "You look beautiful."

Her shyness kicked in. She looked down, unable to look into his eyes without crying. Nobody had ever said she was beautiful before.

He did more than that. He took both of her hands in his, and leaned forward to kiss her. Maybe his lips could have been softer on hers, but she didn't think so. Maybe his kiss could have been sweeter, but she didn't think that was possible either. His simple kiss made her heart pound. She had fallen for him hard. She could only think about being with him. The alternative was unthinkable.

XXXXXX

They were holding hands walking down the hallway at the school. They were getting a lot of looks, from both guys and girls.

“Everybody is staring at us.” El said, keeping her head low.

“It’s because they’ve never seen a girl as pretty as you are. I think they are jealous that you are with me. Your look is unique El, and I don’t know what you did but your eyes really stand out. That’s what they are looking at.”

“It’s just a little makeup.”

“I hope you didn’t do that for me.”

“A little...”

“Do it for yourself, if it makes you feel good. It’s your heart. I’ve read that when old souls find each other again, the heart remembers the love. I think... I think that’s why, that, uh, maybe it seemed like everything was happening so quick.”

That was a good enough reason for El.

XXXXXX

Just after lunch they were sitting at a table with Max. It was the first time they’d seen her all day.

“So... did you guys boink all weekend?”

El could feel her cheeks turning pink.

Mike was about to say something, but Max held up her hands, “I don’t want to know any details. I just hope you two are serious, because you are moving very fast.”

“If Mike wants me to, I will be with him forever.”

Max just looked at El, then nodded slowly.

XXXXX

An announcement came over the PA system that there was a horrible house fire on Maple St. And anybody living close to avoid the area so emergency vehicles could get in and out.

*Maple Street?* El thought, *that's where... oh, no. oh no.* She quickly gathered her books and jammed them into her backpack, she took a quick look at the clock and figured out what classroom Mike would be in.

She ran to it. Thinking the worst. She got to Mike's class and panicked when she didn't see Mike. Had he left already? She managed to catch Dustin's eye, he excused himself and came out to the hallway.

“Did Mike leave as soon as that announcement came out? You'd think they would have pulled him from class first. I'm really worried.”

What Dustin said next made her blood freeze. “Uh, I don't know how to tell you this, but there are rumours they found three... ah shit, I'm sorry El. Mike isn't in class today. He had to go home for something. Shit. Shit. Shit.

*Ohno ohno ohno ohno.* El was paralyzed.

*“Would El Hopper come to the main office please.... El Hopper to the main office.”*

El didn't move. Her mind seemed to be spiraling away to nothing. Dustin steered her toward the main office.

When she got there and saw her dad, his hat in his hand, she her knees gave out and she collapsed, and then passed out.



XXXXX

When she came to she was inconsolable. She barely heard what her dad was saying.

She was numb. She found herself being walked to her dad's truck, picked up and put in the seat, and finally she heard the seat belt clicking securely.

Hopper had a hard time speaking, "Ok, you've probably heard that they found three bodies. We know for sure that two were female."

El's silent crying started.

"Mike is in the hospital."

She looked up, the faint spark of hope jabbed at her heart.

"I'm not gonna sugar coat it. It's bad. I don't know how bad yet, that's why I'm taking you to the hospital. I don't know if they'll let you see him or not."

XXXXX

It was selfish of El to hope that Mike was still alive, but that he'd lost the remaining members of his family.

A young nurse met them at the nurses station. She was very polite, she didn't ask them if they were his family. By now all of Hawkins knew that Mike had lost his mother and sister and that he was in the hospital.

"You must be El? He's been asking about you. You are his

girlfriend?" El nodded. The flood of relief that El felt was palpable, she was lightheaded and she thought she might pass out again.

"Sorry, Chief, you can ask him questions afterwards. He'll be calmer. Let me prepare you... he tried to save his mother and sister, but the house was burning so quickly that a support beam from the house fell on him, it broke both of his knees, shins and feet. He maybe be able walk again, but best case scenario with a limp, worse case, he may need to have his legs amputated, the damage is bad. For now he'll be in a wheel chair until they heal enough for him the doctor to make a further prognosis. Just prepare yourself ok? He needs a lot of support right now."

"His face was cut by some wiring, he will have a scar."

El nodded, anxious to get to his room, "I need to see him."

The nurse led Hopper and El to his room, "You stay out here." She told Hopper. It wasn't a suggestion.

"He's a little out of it, he was given something for the pain. But he's coherent, he can talk and understand what you are saying. He knows about his family, you don't need to bring that up."

El nodded. The tears had been flowing non-stop on her face.

She was surprised to see that Mike was sitting up. He had a bandage over one eye diagonally across his face. She could see his full lips.

The nurse leaned to her and whispered, "You can kiss him, but nothing strenuous ok?"

As soon as Mike saw her, he turned to look away. Both of his legs were in large casts that went half way up his thighs. El had been expecting a lot worse.

"Don't you do that to me Mike. Don't look away. I don't want to hear that you are damaged goods and I should find someone else. That you want me to be happy. I don't want to hear it."

Mike was still looking away when he said. "I wasn't going to say that. I was working up the courage to say something else."

"You don't need courage to tell me anything."

Mike turned his back to her, she could see the tears from both eyes soaking his bandages. "I was hoping we'd still be together... after this."

"Mike," El stepped closer. "Why wouldn't we be... we love each other... right?"

Mike winced as he tried to nod, "I'll have a scar... and maybe I'll walk again, maybe not... but..."

She could see more tears seeping into his bandages. "I've lost everyone now El. I don't want to..."

"Mike, you won't lose me. I will tell you this over and over."

Mike snorted. "...and I'm homeless now."

"You live with me. Problem solved."

"But..."

"No *buts* , Mike. I'm not leaving your side. We'll figure it out together. Ok?"

"Ok."

"Good. Now I'm going to tell the nurse that I'm staying with you tonight."

"I feel sorry for the nurse already." Mike smiled.

That was good enough for El, "I'll be right back."

## 6. Living

### Notes for the Chapter:

Once again, no more story left on this one. Short chapter to finish.

“Ok, you’re mad at me El.”

“You got past your grief Mike. I know... I mean I *know* it wasn’t easy for you. You lost your family. And you lost your legs trying to save them. No higher being is going to fault you for that.”

Mike was silent. His feet were itchy.

The ones he didn’t have anymore.

“But, you have a girl who loves you with all her heart. Knowing you almost sacrificed yourself to save your family... that’s a hard act to follow. Mike...” El said softly, “I’m not mad at you... but it’s time to live your life. I’m not going anywhere Mike.”

“You wouldn’t be grossed out if I got a pair of those blade prosthetics? I think it will help me keep in shape. I’d be able to walk almost normally and I wouldn’t need the wheelchair nearly as much and... and..”

“...and what Mike?”

“I could stand up for my wedding... you know... if you wanted to stick around...”

“I think that’s the one thing that guys miss out on a lot...” El said, adjust the bed covers.

“What’s that?” Mike asked.

“Proposal sex. And we are about to have some.”